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SUBJECT: GANSU AND QINGHAI TIBETANS SAY TENSIONS EASING,  
RELIGIOUS INTERFERENCE AND DISCRIMINATION CONTINUE

REF: A. 08 BEIJING 4092

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor  
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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11. (S) Tibetans in Qinghai and Gansu provinces reported that human rights conditions are slowly improving, particularly in Qinghai, though some Tibetan monks and academics complained that they continue to experience pressure to cooperate with government propaganda campaigns. PolOff visited the Tibetan regions of the two provinces August 15-25. A Tibetan professor based in Lanzhou, Gansu, told PolOff that an outspoken Tibetan student at his university recently disappeared and is assumed to be in police custody. Authorities continue to censor Tibet-related web content, especially Tibetan-language blogs and websites. Officials reopened Gansu's Labrang Monastery to foreign tourists in June, although, according to one source, ten monks remain missing and People's Armed Police continue to keep close watch over the monastery. In July, authorities allowed nearly 100,000 Tibetan Buddhists to gather for a religious festival near Tongde, Qinghai. Monks continue to complain about government interference in religious life, and regular political education sessions remain the norm at most monasteries. A monk at Ta'er (Kumbum) Monastery described a half-hearted attempt by local police in March to remove photos of the Dalai Lama from the monks' living quarters. In Guinan, local police have established a substation inside Lucang Monastery to prevent any unrest. Residents of Yushu, in the far south of Qinghai, told PolOff authorities are doing little to prevent the display of Dalai Lama photos in homes and business, though the closure of a sacred sky burial site near Yushu's new airport created some resentment. Several contacts in Gansu and Qinghai expressed dismay over the difficulty ethnic Tibetans are having in obtaining passports. End Summary.

Protests Have Ended, but Political Pressure Remains

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12. (S) Duola (strictly protect), a professor of Tibetan language at Northwest University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, told PolOff August 15 that while Tibetan regions of Gansu and Qinghai provinces had not seen significant

demonstrations this year, Tibetans continued to feel the political repercussions of the March 2008 unrest. Tibetan faculty at the university remained under pressure to participate in government propaganda efforts. Duola said he had been asked by Communist Party officials in 2008 and again in early 2009 to make a pro-government speech to monks at Labrang Monastery in Xiahe, Gansu Province. The officials had wanted to provide a text for Duola to read to the monks in Tibetan. Duola said he had refused, saying he could not make the trip to Xiahe, a five-hour drive from Lanzhou, due to family reasons. Duola told PolOff he also had refused to teach Tibetan culture to a special class of People's Armed Police officers who had been sent to the university shortly after the events of March 2008. In the end, a more junior Tibetan faculty member had taught the class. Duola said his refusal to participate in such activities had eliminated any chance he had for promotion.

#### Tibetan Students Continue to Disappear

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¶3. (S) Politically active Tibetan students at Northwest University for Nationalities continued to face detention by security officials, Duola said. Duola said that one of his students who had participated in a candlelight vigil at the school on March 16, 2008, and who subsequently had self-published articles challenging official accounts of the March 2008 unrest, had gone missing over the summer break. Duola believed the student had likely been detained by police. Security agents, he added, typically waited until school holidays to detain

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students.

#### Heavy Censorship of Tibetan Websites

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¶4. (S) Duola complained that the growth of Tibetan-language content on the Internet was severely hampered by government censorship. Duola, who is currently developing a Tibetan-language search engine and who founded a website ([www.amdotibet.com](http://www.amdotibet.com)) dedicated to preserving Amdo Tibetan language and culture, said much of the problem stemmed from the Chinese government's poor Tibetan-language capabilities. Internet censors could not read Tibetan and frequently deleted entire blogs and websites regardless of the content. Separately, Caiwang Naoru (strictly protect), chief editor of the Tibet Culture Net website ([www.tibetcu1.com](http://www.tibetcu1.com)), told PolOff August 16 that censorship of his website, which is in Chinese, had been especially strict prior to March 2009. At that time, his web server was located in Sichuan Province, and Sichuan Internet police, he complained, would delete any article containing the Chinese characters for "Dalai Lama" regardless of the context. The situation had improved since he moved his site to a new web-hosting service based in Lanzhou. (Note: Caiwang Naoru told PolOff that he had chosen to make the server switch in March 2009 so that he would have an excuse to shut the website down during the sensitive 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising. Tibet Culture Net had been temporarily shut down by authorities in the weeks immediately following the March 2008 riot, but, Caiwang Naoru stressed to PolOff, the latest shutdown of the website had been his own decision.)

Xiahe, Gansu: Diminishing Tension, but Troops Remain

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¶ 15. (S) PolOff visited Xiahe (Sangchu), Gansu Province, and neighboring Labrang Monastery August 18. Xiahe and Labrang have been the scene of numerous protests since March 2008, the most recent on April 25, 2009, when junior high school students demonstrated against official criticism of the Dalai Lama. PolOff witnessed People's Armed Police (PAP) troops conducting martial arts training in a public park the evening of August 17, and a PAP unit was garrisoned in a government building along Xiahe's main thoroughfare. The overall PAP presence, however, was significantly smaller than what PolOff observed during his last trip to Xiahe in September 2008 (ref A). The PAP checkpoints and sandbag gun emplacements observed in 2008 had all disappeared. During this 10-day trip through Tibetan regions of Gansu and Qinghai, Xiahe was the only place where PolOff observed an unusually heavy presence of PAP troops and other security forces.

Foreign Tourists Returning

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¶ 16. (S) Xiahe was officially reopened to foreigners in late June 2009, according to a local restaurant worker, and PolOff observed approximately two dozen foreign tourists staying in the town. Several hotels and restaurant workers reported that business had improved, though tourist traffic remained below the pre-March 2008 levels. Tibetan restaurant owner Namgal Dolma (strictly protect), with whom PolOff spoke during his previous visit in September 2008, reported an overall drop in tension and said authorities were no longer restricting access by local Tibetans to Labrang Monastery.

Most Labrang Monks Are Back, PAP Keeping Watch

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¶ 17. (S) In Labrang, a monk told PolOff that most of Labrang's 1000 monks had returned to the monastery, though about 10 remained missing and were presumed to be in jail. Five Labrang monks had fled to India since the March 2008 unrest, he said. Authorities were tolerating Dalai Lama photos inside the monks' private quarters but not inside the public prayer halls and temples. (Note: PolOff observed a single, painted image of a young Dalai Lama displayed in one temple.) The poster-sized portraits of the government-appointed Panchen Lama

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that PolOff observed in Labrang in September 2008 had been removed and replaced by smaller portraits. (Note: Most Tibetan Buddhists do not acknowledge the government-recognized Panchen, though Chinese officials sometimes force monks to display his photo at key religious sites.) The "military" was no longer present inside the monastery, according to the monk. (Note: It was unclear if our source was referring to PAP or PLA.) However, "military officers" posing as tourists regularly entered Labrang to conduct surveillance: "We can tell who they are because their haircuts are the same as ours." Though overall tensions in the monastery were lower, the guide said, he and other Labrang monks were still required to attend political study sessions "morning and night."

Qinghai More Stable Than Other Tibetan Areas

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¶ 18. (S) Several contacts remarked that Qinghai Province remained the most politically relaxed of all Tibetan areas in China, with the possible

exception of the Tibetan section of Yunnan Province. Duola, whose own late father-in-law was a high-ranking Tibetan cadre and a former party secretary of Qinghai's Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP), attributed the relative stability of Qinghai to the higher-percentage of ethnic Tibetans in prefecture, county, and township-level leadership positions. Only in Qinghai, Duola asserted, could Tibetan cadres like his father-in-law rise to the level of prefecture (zhou) party secretary. Local Tibetan cadres in Qinghai, Duola said, did their best to blunt the heavy-handed policies set by central and provincial-level leaders.

Thousands of Buddhists Gather near Tongde

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¶ 19. (S) Caiwang Naoru agreed with Duola's assessment that Qinghai enjoyed a more relaxed climate than other Tibetan regions. He told PolOff a large religious festival had taken place July 13-19 at a monastery near Tongde in Qinghai's Hainan TAP. Over the course of the week, more than 100,000 Buddhists had attended the event. Caiwang Naoru, who participated in the festival, said the PAP troops deployed to Tongde to maintain order during the event had been almost all ethnic Tibetan and maintained a very low profile. As a result, the festival, which he said was likely the largest single gathering of Tibetans since March 2008, took place without any major incidents.

Failed DL Photo Confiscation at Ta'er Monastery

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¶ 110. (S) Tenzin Lopsang Gyaltsen (aka "Jensen," strictly protect), a monk at Ta'er (Kumbum) Monastery near Xining, Qinghai Province, told PolOff August 19 that while overall conditions were improving, government attempts to interfere in the monastery continued. Jensen said all 13 Ta'er monks arrested in the aftermath of the March 14, 2008, Lhasa riots had since been released. In March 2009, the Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Huangzhong, the town neighboring Ta'er, had launched a campaign, likely at the behest of Qinghai provincial leaders, Jensen believed, to confiscate Dalai Lama photos from the monks' living quarters. Starting at the bottom section of the monastery and working their way uphill, the PSB officials encountered fierce resistance from monks and gave up after confiscating only a few photos. A few days later, Jensen said, the PSB quietly returned the photos and abandoned the campaign altogether. Jensen said local ethnic Han PSB officers, who had grown up near Ta'er and held favorable views of Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism, conducted such raids with little enthusiasm. As at Labrang, Ta'er monks were still required to attend regular political study sessions, though Jensen said he had been able to "graduate" from these classes in July after passing a lengthy exam on "socialism." Younger monks (Jensen is 39), however, had to continue to attend political education meetings, he said.

New "Medical Clinic" in Lucang Monastery

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¶ 111. (S) PolOff traveled August 19 to Guinan (Mangra), a Tibetan town in Qinghai Province's Hainan TAP, and met with Luosang Cicheng Pengcuo (strictly protect), a living Buddha resident at Guinan's Lucang (Lutsang) Monastery. Pengcuo said the monastery was still feeling the effects of a

February 25, 2009, protest by monks over government efforts to force Tibetans to celebrate the Losar New Year holiday (ref C). Pengcuo had just returned from Xinning to visit four Lucang monks who remained in a "reeducation through labor" facility for their involvement in the demonstration. PolOff observed a new closed-circuit television camera installed at the entrance to the monastery following the February demonstration. Pengcuo pointed out the presence of a newly constructed building with a sign reading "Tibetan Medicine Clinic." Pengcuo told PolOff the "clinic" was actually a Guinan PSB police substation that had been established inside the monastery following the February protest. As PolOff and Pengcuo were strolling around the monastery August 20, a uniformed Tibetan PSB officer approached and told Pengcuo that the next day the Qinghai Provincial PSB Director (ting zhang) would visit the monastery and asked that Pengcuo be available to meet him. To minimize tensions, Pengcuo said, the Guinan PSB assigned ethnic Tibetan officers to the monastery substation. Several of these Tibetan policemen, he said, prayed in the monastery's temples at the end of their shift "to atone." As further evidence of tighter government management of the monastery, Pengcuo pointed to address plates that were affixed to the doors of all the monks' quarters. Pengcuo said in early 2009 local officials had started requiring that all structures have a PSB-issued address plate and this new policy was designed to restrict the future expansion of the monastery.

¶12. (S) Pengcuo said that while the tensions related to March 2008 were gradually fading in Guinan, provincial officials were still putting political pressure on him to participate in meetings and praise the Chinese government's religious policies. In June, at the behest of Guinan officials, Pengcuo attended a Party-organized conference at Ta'er monastery of Qinghai-area Buddhist leaders. Pengcuo described how in late July he was suddenly called to a meeting at a Guinan hotel with a visiting official of the Communist Party United Front Work Department. The official asked Pengcuo about his views on the March 2008 unrest and asked whether he would be interested in a position within the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, a united front advisory body that contains non-Communist Party members, including religious figures). Pengcuo told PolOff he had no interest in such a post, but that this was a common method used by the Party to co-opt influential monks.

Yushu: Relative Freedom

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¶13. (S) PolOff traveled to Yushu in southern Qinghai Province August 21-24. Yushu resident Tashi Dhondup (strictly protect), who goes by the English name Vincent, described Yushu Prefecture, with a population that is 97-percent Tibetan, as enjoying a higher level of religious freedom compared to other Tibetan communities. PolOff observed Dalai Lama photos in private homes and businesses throughout Yushu. Several temples, including Yushu's Jiana Mani Stone Pile, a major pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists, featured prominent displays of the Dalai Lama's photos in public areas. However, PolOff observed that such photos were not displayed at other religious sites frequented by Han tourists, such as the Temple of Princess Wencheng. According to Vincent, Qinghai provincial officials had attempted to launch a campaign in early 2009 to remove photos of the Dalai Lama from private homes in Yushu. Local Tibetan and Han officials, however, had successfully argued that such a campaign would spark public outrage and create instability in an

area that otherwise had weathered the March 2008 crisis without major violence.

¶14. (S) Several Yushu residents told PolOff that Tibetan government workers were able to practice

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Buddhism after work hours without restriction. Suonan Zhuoma (strictly protect), a retired cadre, told PolOff she remained a devout Buddhist and felt no conflict between her faith and her Communist Party membership. Communist Party members in Yushu, she said, were free to practice Buddhism so long as they did not carry or display images of the Dalai Lama, "because he is a separatist."

¶15. (S) Yushu was not devoid of tensions, however. Vincent described how immediately after the outbreak of rioting in Lhasa on March 14, 2008, Yushu PSB commanders had ordered all ethnic Tibetan police officers to relinquish their guns. The Tibetan policemen were then issued fake guns to carry in their holsters. Vincent, who said he had several friends in the PSB, told PolOff the incident continued to reverberate in Yushu as a reminder that "ultimately (the Han Chinese) do not trust us." Many Tibetans were also angry over the closure this summer of a major sky burial site near Yushu. According to Vincent, officials had claimed to fear the vultures attracted to the sky burial site would cause a hazard to aircraft at Yushu's new airport, which opened in early August.

Passports: Tibetans Need Not Apply

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¶16. (S) During this trip, contacts almost universally complained about the difficulty Tibetans face in obtaining passports. Duola, the university professor who was born in Guinan, Qinghai, said passports had become almost impossible for Tibetans to obtain in his hometown. In Lanzhou, however, where the Tibetan community is much smaller, Tibetans are not encountering much difficulty. Jensen, the Ta'er Monastery monk, told PolOff his own passport had been confiscated in 2002 after he had returned from two years of study in the United States. Average Tibetans in Qinghai, Jensen said, were unable to get travel documents from their local PSB offices unless they had direct connections to influential political leaders. In Yushu, Vincent told PolOff that since March 2008 even extension of existing passports had become nearly impossible for ethnic Tibetans. While Han in Yushu were able to obtain passports in one or two weeks, Tibetans experienced endless delays. Vincent told PolOff one of his close friends had had a full scholarship to study at a U.S. university but had to give up the opportunity after the PSB refused to issue him a passport. Vincent, whose own passport will expire in April 2010, said he was considering taking a trip overseas solely for the purpose of applying for a new passport at a Chinese embassy abroad, where applications by Tibetans reportedly meet less resistance.

HUNTSMAN